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Message Text

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46
ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SAM-01 SAB-01

SAJ-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01

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P R 021715Z JUL 74
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 955
INFO AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 1320

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS: PFOR
SUBJECT: DIPLOMATIC TOUR OF QUNEITRA

REF: DAMASCUS 1286

1.ON MORNING JULY 2 THE DAMASCUS DIPLOMATIC CORPS VISITED QUNEITRA AS GUEST OF FOREIGN MINISTRY. FORM WHAT I COULD TELL ALL MISSIONS WERE REPRESENTED ALTHOUGH I PERSONALLY DID NOT SEE THE SOVIET AMBASSADOR. THE GROUP OF 100 OR SO DIPLOMATS WERE ESCORTED INTO THE CENTER OF THE CITY WHERE AT THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH ONE OF THE FEW BUILDINGS LEFT STANDING IN THE CITY THE GOVERNOR OF THE MUHAFADHAT SET THE TONE FOR WHAT WAS TO FOLLOW, AS STATED IN DAMASCUS CONFIDENTIAL

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REFTEL. ESSENTIALLY HIS MESSAGE WAS ONE OF BITTERNESS

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AND OUTRAGE AT THE "WANTON AND SPITEFUL DESTRUCTION"
WHICH THE ISRAELIS HAD PERPETRATED ON THE ABANDONED HOMES
OF 50,000 PEOPLE WHO "FOR THE LAST
SEVEN YEARS HAVE BEE OBLIGED TO LIVE IN TENTS BUT ALWAYS
WITH THE HOPE THAT THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO RETURN TO THEIR
DWELLING PLACES" HE CALLED ON THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS
TO REPORT"THE TRUTH" BACK TO THEIR HOME GOVERNMENTS
ABOUT THE ZIONIST CIVILIZATION WHICH UP TO THE LAST MINUTE
WAS BULLDOZING AND BLOWING UP BUILDINGS". AFTER THESE
WELCOME REMARKS WE WRE ALSO GIVEN AN INFORMATION SHEET
GIVING FACTS AND FITURES ABOUT QUNEITRA DESCRIBING IT WEALTH
BEFORE 1967 IN CONTRAST TO IT PRESENT LOOTED DESOLUTION.

2. THE GROUP WAS TAKEN ON A GUIDED TOUR OF THE
CITY WITH STOPS AT VARIOUS PLACES FOR THE GOVERNOR TO
POINT OUT SUCH TINGS A FRESH BULLDOZER TRACKS, NEWLY
UPROOTED TREES AND OF COURSE RUINED HOUSE AFTER HOUSE
WE WERE TAKEN TO THE HOSPITAL AT WHOSE STEPS THE GOVERNOR
AGAIN MADE A BRIEF SPEECH TO THE GROUP SAYING THE
HOSPITAL HAD BEEN COMPLETELY LOOTED AND THEN HAD BEEN
USED FOR TARGET PRACTICE.(ITS WALLS WERE COMPLETELY
POCKMARKED AND THERE WAS NOTHING IN THE BUILDING)
SEVERAL SCHOOLS WERE ALSO SUBSEQUENTLY SHOWN US AS WELL
AS TWO MOSQUES,ONE OF WHOE MINARETS HAD ACCORDING
TO THE GOVERNOR BEEN USED AS AN OBSERVATION TOWER WHILE
THE BULDING ITSELF HAD BEEN TOTALLY DESTROYED. THE GOVERNOR
ALSO SAID THAT THE CITY AND THE SURROUNDING AREA
WAS FULL OF MINES AND BOOBY TRAPS. WE THEN
RETURNED TO THE CHURCH WHERE REFRESHMENTS WERE SERVED
WHILE SEVERAL INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN RECOUNTED TO THE
GROUP STORIES WHICH COORABORATED THE ALLEGATIONS OF THE
GOVENOR THAT THE ISRAELIS CARRIED OUT LAST MINUTE
DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY "OUT OF SPITE AND HATREED OF
THE ARABS", AFTER THE DISENGATEMENT AGREEMENT HAD BEEN
SIGNED.

3. DURING OUR TOUR THE GOVERNOR MADE A SPECIAL POINT OUF
SEEKING ME OUT IN THE CROWD AND THEN ARABIC POURING OUT
RECIMINATIONS AGAINST THE ISRAELIS AND ASKING ME
RHETORICALLY WHAT I THOUGHT OF THESE PEOPLE "WHO
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CLAIMED TO BE CIVILIZED." FOR MOST OF THE TIME HE WAS
GOOD NATURED (HE KEPT CALLING ME BROTHER) ALTHOUGH
OCCASIONALLY WHEN I REFUSED TO BE DRAWN INTO CONVERSATION
HE OBVIOUSLY HAD DIFFICULTY RESTRAING HIMSELF.FOR EXAMPLE
AT TONE TIME HE ASKED ,"ISNT THIS LAND OUR LAND"? IF
SOMETHING LIKE THIS HAPPENED TO AN AMERICAN CITY WOULDN'T
YOU BE ANGRY.

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4. COMMENT: NEEDLESS TO SAY IT WAS A DIFFICULT AND
UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION TO BE IN, PARTICULARLY AS VARIOUS
NEWSMEN KEP POKING THEIR MICROPHONES IN OUR FACES SO
AS TO GET OUR REACTIONS, WITH THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF THE
FOREIGN MINISTRY REPRESENTATIVES. ALL OF THE DIPLOMATS WERE
HOUNDED BY THE NEWSMEN FOR COMMENT AND MOST OF THE DIPLOMATS
INCLUDING MYSELF FOUND IT IMPOSSIBLE TO AVOID COMMENTING.
I LIMITED MYSELF TO SAYING THAT TO SEVERAL OF THOSE
INCLUDING SYRIAN TC WAR IS A TERRIBLE THING. FOR THIS REASON
MY GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO WORKING FOR PEACE IN THE
HOPE THAT THINGS LIKE THIS WILL NOT HAPPEN AGAIN AND THEREBY
WE CAN MAKE A BETTER WORLD FOR OURSELVES AND OUR CHILDREN"

5. AS I MENTIONED IN AN EARLIER CABLE(DAMASCUS
1248) I BELIEVE THE ISRALIS LOST A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY
HERE TO BEGIN THE PROCESS OF RAPPROSHMENT WITH
THE SYRIANS. I FULLY APPRECIATE THE FACT THAT MUCH
OF THE DESTRUCTION MAY HAVE OCCURRED IN THE DAYS
AFTER THE 1967 WAR, BUT IT WAS QUITE OBVIOUS TO ME AT LEAST
THAT A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT APPEARED TO BE RECENT. THE
DESTRUCTION OF THE MOSQUE AND THE HOSPITAL SEEMED
PARTICUARLY GRATUITOUS TO MY LAYMAN'S EYE.IF THE
ISREALIS HAD ONLY MADE ONE GESTURE FOR EXAMPLE TRYING
TO RETURN THE HOSPITAL IN REASONABLE GOOD CONDITION OR
HAD REPAIRED THE MOSQUE I THINK THAT THIS WOULD HAVE
GONE A LONG WAY. INSTEAD THE DESTRUCTION OF QUENEITRA
HAS ONLY CONFIRMED IN THE MINDS OF MANY SYRIANS THEIR
SUSPICIONS FEARS AND HATRED
OF THE ISRAELIS. IN THIS REGARD I AM CONCERENED ABOUT
THE FUTURE IN THAT AREA GIVEN THE PROXIMITY OF THE
ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS TO THE TOWNS (YOU CAN SEE THE ISRAELI
FIELDS QUITE DISTINCTLY FROM ANYWHERE IN THE TOWN) THIS
PROXIMITY IS GOOD REASON FOR EFFORTS TO BE MADE NOT TO
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LET THE SITUATION STAGNATE EITHER IN TERMS
OF RECONSTRUCTION OR IN TERMS OF WORKING TOWARDS A FINAL
PEACE SETTLEMENT. AS THE QUNEITRANS STREAM BACK INTO
THE CITY AND SEE WHAT HAS HAPPENED AND THEN LOOK OVER
THE ROAD AT ISRAELIS FARMING THEIR FIELDS I AM AFRAID THAT
IS EVERY POTENTIAL FOR SERIOUS INCIDENTS WHICH COULD
PUT HEAVY STRAINS ON THE SYRIAN-ISRAELIS DISENGAGEMENT
AGREEMENT. END COMMENT
SCOTES

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